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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001092

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PDPA FOR DALTON, MITCHELL AND SIMS  
NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER  
LONDON FOR GURNEY  
PARIS FOR NEARY  
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION MASS ACTION IN ZIM; HARARE

11. While editorials in the independent newspapers are in favor of the proposed week-long mass protests that are expected to begin in Zimbabwe today (June 2), called by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to force Robert Mugabe to enter into a serious and genuine dialogue with the MDC to break the political and economic impasse gripping the country, the government-controlled print and electronic media is devoting acres of editorial space and airtime to calling for the arrest of the entire MDC leadership, and discouraging the people of Zimbabwe from participating in the marches and demonstrations. Editorial excerpts follow:

12. Under headline "The price of inertia" the independent daily "The Daily News" (06/02) comments:

"Today the MDC party begins a week of mass demonstrations. . . MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and his party may or may not succeed in this onerous task they have set themselves. But that the Zimbabwe crisis must now be resolved in the streets and possibly with innocent blood being shed in the process is a sad indictment against those to whom ordinary Zimbabweans and indeed millions of ordinary Africans look up to for leadership. It would be an indictment against Mugabe personally if Zimbabwe burns in the days ahead. . . We can only hope that the events of this week will be clear enough to Mbeki, Obasanjo and Muluzi that they should stop shielding Mugabe. And that instead they should convey the message that Zimbabweans by coming out into the streets are trying to put across to him and that is: for all the good he may have done for this country in the past he must step down in order to give this country a chance to start afresh and move forward."

13. Under headline "Tsvangirai must pay for his sins" the government-controlled daily "The Herald" (06/02) comments:

"The time has now come for opposition MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, to pay the price for his sins against the people of Zimbabwe and to show him that, like everyone else, he is not above the law. . . His unprecedented backing by the United States, Britain, some members of the European Union and the white Commonwealth has made him feel invincible and that no one can touch him no matter how many laws he breaks and how much suffering he has brought to bear on the people of Zimbabwe. . . Until his case is finalized, the MDC leader must be put into protective custody so that he does not further endanger the lives of innocent people who might be caught up in the crossfire of his reckless actions. . . It is now time to act and reassure Zimbabweans that everyone is equal before the law. . ."

14. Under headline "Enough is enough" a front-page editorial in the government-controlled "Chronicle" (06/02) comments:

"The High Court on Saturday outlawed MDC's planned mass action to oust President Mugabe's democratically elected government from power. . . If Tsvangirai and his thugs dare defy this lawful order, then they should face the full wrath of the law. . . We demand that police should move with speed and arrest the confused opposition leader and his cronies and throw the keys into the sea. Enough is enough. . . We cannot tolerate lawlessness in the country because the perpetrator is backed by some foreign power that will condemn us for doing what is right. Let the British and the Americans who have openly supported Tsvangirai's illegal statement and actions say whatever they want. We cannot be bullied into allowing lawlessness because we are afraid of cowboys and gay gangsters. . . We demand that any and all that dare soil our streets with misguided marches must be thrown behind bars. And

we urge the courts to throw the full book at any one who will be arrested. . . We urge members of the public to show charlatans like Tsvangirai that they cherish the peace and tranquility by going about their business normally this entire week. . . ."

15. Under headline "Road map for Zimbabwe" the independent weekly "The Daily News on Sunday" (06/02) comments:

". . . The government would be well-advised to let the march proceed uninterrupted, unless there is clear evidence of violence. Interfering with such a road map could lead to a political dead-end for the country."

16. In a front-page editorial under headline "Do or Die" the independent weekly "The Standard" (06/01) comments:

"The week we have just begun could mark a turning point in the 23-year history of independent Zimbabwe as ordinary citizens make the choice between the status quo and a new political dispensation. It is a sad indictment those who have enjoyed the privilege of leading this country over the past 23 years that today, a once prosperous beacon of hope in Africa, has been reduced to another basket case in a much maligned continent. . . As Zimbabweans either march in their cities and towns or simply stay at home, it will not necessarily be about the removing the de facto President and the government from power but to say 'Enough is Enough.' The tide of feeling about the tragedy that has gripped the country is running very high and this could be the opportunity for Zimbabweans to shake off a label now being bandied around - that we are a docile people. . . ."

17. Under headline "The fire this time" a second editorial published on page 8 in the same edition comments:

". . . This week's demonstrations are not the sort that split society and families. Zimbabweans of all races and creeds fully support these peaceful marches and want to be fully involved in them and if uniformed forces try to mow down the marchers, they will be forgiven. Be that as it may, Zimbabweans this week will prove equal to the challenge. The demonstrations this time appear to usher a new Zimbabwe."

18. Under headline "Defining moment for Zimbabweans" the government-controlled weekly "The Sunday Mail" (06/01) comments:

"We are praying and hoping that reason will prevail and Zimbabweans will not be misled into backing the maneuvers by the opposition MDC to attempt to remove a constitutionally elected President by force. This is a defining moment, not in the sense in which the opposition would want it to be, but in the sense that Zimbabweans have an opportunity to demonstrate their political maturity, and uphold the rule of law. . . Taking matters into their own hands would be foolish, as it would at best achieve nothing and at worst set the country up in flames. While many would have views about how the political question should be resolved, we believe they should give the African mediators an opportunity to find common grounds around which national dialogue and hopefully national consensus could be built. . . ."